

## CARIBBEAN

*More than 440 000 people are currently living with HIV in the Caribbean, including 53 000 people who were newly infected with the virus in 2004 alone. An estimated 36 000 people died of AIDS in the region this year. In 2004, 210 000 women were living with HIV in the Caribbean.*

- With average adult HIV prevalence of 2.3%, the Caribbean is the second-most affected region in the world after sub-Saharan Africa.
- Overall, Caribbean countries have the highest HIV-infection levels among women in the Americas and AIDS has become the leading cause of death among adults aged 15–44 years. In Haiti, life expectancy at birth in 2010 is projected to be 10 years less than it would have been without AIDS.
- Unlike in Latin America, HIV transmission in the Caribbean is occurring largely through heterosexual intercourse (almost two thirds of all AIDS cases to date are attributed to this mode of transmission).
- The number of new HIV infections among women in the Caribbean now outstrips that among men. Latest estimates suggest that roughly as many women as men are now living with HIV in this region. According to a population-based survey carried out in 2002, women younger than 24 years in the Dominican Republic were almost twice as likely to be HIV-infected compared with their male peers.
- Haiti continues to have the largest number of people living with HIV in the Caribbean: some 280 000 at the end of 2003.
- The latest round of HIV surveillance among pregnant women shows HIV prevalence varying between 1.8% and almost 7% in different parts of Haiti. Recent behavioural surveillance has shown that a significant proportion of the country's largely young population (about 60% of which is under 24 years) is sexually active and having unprotected sex and the survey showed that 18% of urban women in their late teens had been pregnant at least once.
- Jamaica has the second-highest annual number of AIDS cases and deaths in the region, after Haiti. An estimated 22 000 people were living with HIV in Jamaica at the end of 2003. While a handful of other islands in the region appear to be making incremental inroads against the epidemic by expanding access to antiretroviral treatment, at least 900 AIDS cases have been reported in Jamaica each year since 1999. The disease has been claiming between 590 and 690 lives annually over the same period—more than double the numbers just four years earlier.
- In the Bahamas and Barbados, there are indications that stronger prevention efforts since the late 1990s could be forcing HIV infection levels lower. In the Bahamas, HIV prevalence among pregnant women fell from 4.8% in 1993 and

3.6% in 1996 to 3% in 2002. In Barbados, new HIV diagnoses among pregnant women dropped substantially between 1999 and 2003, from 0.7% to 0.3%.

- The Dominican Republic still faces a serious epidemic with HIV prevalence among pregnant women higher than 2% nationally. In the capital Santo Domingo, HIV prevalence among 15–24 year-old pregnant women—which can offer a hint of recent infection rates—has declined from around 3% in 1995 to below 1% in 2003.
- Although Cuba has very low HIV prevalence, the epidemic is now growing. A sharp increase in newly reported HIV cases has occurred since the late 1990s, with the annual number of reported new cases growing almost five-fold between 1995 and 2000.
- The lack of good quality HIV surveillance data in most Caribbean countries is hampering the ability to design and run potentially effective prevention programmes, and will almost certainly undermine efforts to expand access to antiretroviral treatment.
- Widespread homophobia is creating an environment for the spread of HIV by driving men who have sex with men further away from the information, services, and security they need if they are to protect themselves against HIV. Meanwhile, the unequal social and economic status of women and men is acting as a powerful dynamic in epidemics that are growing amid ongoing stigma, misconceptions and denial.

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*For more information, please contact Dominique De Santis, UNAIDS, Geneva, tel. +41 22 791 4509 or mobile (+41 79) 254 6803, or Annemarie Hou, UNAIDS, Geneva, tel. +41 22 791 4577. For more information about UNAIDS, visit [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org).*